1.1. Practising nurses per 1 000 population (A-11)

1.1.1. Documentation sheet

Description	**Principal indicator:** Practising nurses per 1 000 population **Secondary indicators:** Licensed to practice (LTP) and professionally active nurses per 1000 population
Calculation	**Principal indicator:** • Numerator : Number of practising nurses (active in the health sector) x 1000 (end-of-year situation, 31/12) • Denominator: Total end of year Belgian population (1st January t+1) **Secondary indicators:** • Numerator : Number of nurses licensed to practise / professionally active on the labour market x 1000 (end-of-year situation, 31/12) • Denominator: Total end of year Belgian population (1st January t+1)
Technical definition	**Principal indicator:** Practising nurses are defined as those active in the health sector. • A nurse is considered as active in the health sector when he/she is registered as self-employed into National Institute for the Social Security of the Self-employed (NISSE) database and had provided a minimum level of services per year (at least 10% of the activity level of a full time self-employed, i.e. 817 services in 2018 based on RIZIV-INAMI nomenclature) or when she/he is registered as salaried worker into National Social Security Office (NSSO) database with at least 0.1 full time equivalent (FTE) per year and is working for an active employer in the health sector.[1] **Secondary indicators:** • A licensed to practice nurse (LTP) is defined as nurses who have obtained a recognised qualification in nursing in the cadastre database (see also the differences according to the "data sources" in the section below). • A nurse is considered as professionally active when he/she is registered as self-employed person into NISSE database or when he/she is registered as salaried worker into NSSO database with at least 0.1 full time equivalent (FTE) per year. The threshold of 0.1 FTE per year has been established by the working group on nurses within the Planning Unit for the Supply of Healthcare Professions of the FPS Public Health.[1] Full-time equivalent (FTE) estimates were calculated as followed: • For employees, FTE estimates were provided by the Datawarehouse on Labour Markets and Social Protection using the annual activity rate and the activity rate provided in a healthcare sector during the last quarter of the year. • For the self-employed nurses, FTE estimates were based on the number of RIZIV-INAMI nursing services provided during the year. For 2018, the activity of a full-time self-employed nurse was considered equivalent to 8 170 RIZIV-INAMI services on an annual basis and a reimbursed amount of €75 781 (corresponding to the medians observed for the self-employed age group 45-54, based on the RIZIV-INAMI nomenclature). The resulting FTE was the mean of both computations.

Rationale	Nurses play a critical role in providing healthcare in hospitals and long-term care institutions, but also in primary care and in the home care setting. In addition, they are in most countries the largest group of healthcare professionals. Monitoring the number of practising nurses per 1000 population is therefore important in light of the accessibility and sustainability of the healthcare system. These are essential figures for workforce planning.[2]
Data source	Data source: OECD Health Statistics 2021[3]; In this OECD database:
	• The number of nurses licensed to practice is based on the number of nurses who had completed a programme of nursing education (number of "diploma") in the Federal database of healthcare professionals ("Cadastre/Kadaster"), Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (FPS Public Health). The value for 2022 came from health workforce (HWF) annual statistics of the FPS Public Health.[4]
	• The number of professionally active nurses on the labour market is based on the PlanCad for nurses:
	○ 2010-2015 data have been estimated by using the average share for the period 2004-2009 of professionally active nurses among all nurses licensed to practice from the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2009 published in 2014 (i.e. 79.15%)[5];
	○ 2016 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2016 published in 2018[6]; 2017 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2017 published in 2019[7], 2018 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018 published in 2021.[1]
	○ 2019-2022 data have been estimated by the share of professionally active nurses (70.68%), practising nurses (60.09%), and FTE practising nurses (51.07%) among all nurses licensed to practice in 2018 published in the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018[1], KCE calculation
	• The number of practising nurses is based on the PlanCad for nurse.
	○ 2010-2015 data have been estimated by using the 2009 share of practising nurses among all professionally active nurses from the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2009 published in 2014 (i.e. 79.15%)[5];
	○ 2016 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2016 published in 2018[6]; 2017 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2017 published in 2019[7], 2018 data comes from the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018 published in 2021[1]
	○ 2019-2022 data have been estimated by the share of professionally active nurses (70.68%), practising nurses (60.09%), and FTE practising nurses (51.07%) among all nurses licensed to practice in 2018 published in the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018[1], KCE calculation
	Estimates in full-time equivalent (FTE) are based on data from the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018 published in 2021.[1]
	It should be noted that data from the PlanCad slightly differ from the other workforce statistics because of another extraction period and a larger selection (people with a diploma in midwifery who are registered as a nurse are included in the PlanCad).
Limitations	The number of professionally active nurses and practising nurses in 2010-2015 and 2019-2022 are based on estimates (see data sources).
	Practising nurses does not necessarily work as nurses (e.g. nurses who have switched to an administrative job in a hospital or a management position are also counted)
International comparability	The differences in inclusion and exclusion criteria between countries make international comparison of these data hazardous. Austria and Greece for example report only nurses working in hospital, resulting in an under-estimation.

	As stated above, in OECD health statistics[2] for Belgium, the 2010-2015 data on professionally active nurses and nurses practising in the health system are based on estimates.
Dimension	Accessibility (health workforce)
Related indicators	Practising physicians (A-10), nursing graduates (S-8), nurses following the bachelor routes (S-9); nurses aged 50 years old and over (S-10), foreign-trained nurses (S-16), projection of the number of nurses active in the healthcare sector (S-22); healthcare professionals who consider leaving the profession (R-1), hospital bed closures due to staff absenteeism or force majeure (R-2), nurses vacancies in hospitals (R-3)
Reviewers	Van den Heede Koen, Mahieu Timothée

1.1.2. Results

Belgium

Based on OECD health statistics, in 2018[a], there were 210 507 nurses licensed to practise, 148 782 nurses professionally active on the labour market, and 126 496 practising nurses (107 515 in FTE, based on the PlanCad for nurses 2004-2018[1]) (see Table 1). Figure 1 shows that the increase in the density of nurses per 1000 population is more important for nurses licensed to practice than for professionally active nurses or practising nurses (+22%, +9%, and +15% (+12% in FTE)) respectively between 2010 and 2018.

Based on estimates, there were about 161 364 nurses professionally active on the labour market and 137 193 practising nurses (116 607 in FTE) in 2022 (KCE calculation).

Analysis by demographic characteristics

In Table 2, results are detailed by community, region of activity, age, gender and nationality for each category of nurses (Licensed to practice, professionally active and practising nurses) in 2018. For the 126 496 (107 515 in FTE) practising nurses, around one third (30%) was aged below 35 year old and around one third (32%) above 50 years old, 14.9% were male (17% in FTE), and 6.4% had a foreign nationality (6.9% in FTE) (See also S-10 on the proportion of nurses aged 50 years old and over and S-16 on foreign-trained nurses).

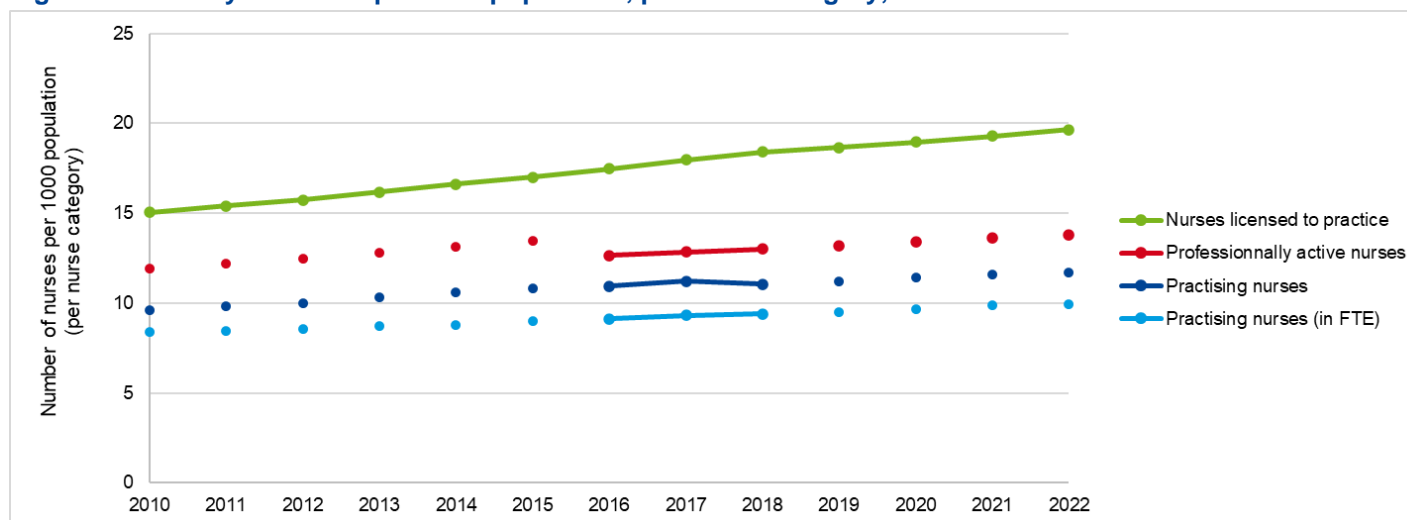[a]   The last publication of PlanCad nurses is based on 2018.

Table 1 – Number and density (per 1000 population) of nurses (all categories) in Belgium (2010-2022)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*
Nurses licensed to practice	Number	**164 141**	**170 023**	**174 849**	**180 547**	**186 277**	**191 805**	**198 030**	**204 256**	**210 507**	**214 352**	**218 665**	**223 649**	**228 309***
	Density (per 1000)	**15.1**	**15.4**	**15.7**	**16.2**	**16.6**	**17.0**	**17.5**	**18.0**	**18.4**	**18.7**	**19.0**	**19.3**	**19.7**
Professionally active nurses	Number	*129 916*	*134 572*	*138 392*	*142 901*	*147 437*	*151 812*	**143 470**	**146 094**	**148 782**	*151 500*	*154 548*	*158 070*	*161 364*
	Density (per 1000)	*11.9*	*12.2*	*12.5*	*12.8*	*13.2*	*13.5*	**12.7**	**12.8**	**13.0**	*13.2*	*13.4*	*13.6*	*13.8*
Practising nurses	Number	*104 513*	*108 258*	*111 331*	*114 959*	*118 608*	*122 127*	**124 196**	**127 681**	**126 496**	*128 807*	*131 398*	*134 393*	*137 193*
	Density (per 1000)	*9.6*	*9.8*	*10.0*	*10.3*	*10.6*	*10.8*	**11.0**	**11.2**	**11.1**	*11.2*	*11.4*	*11.6*	*11.7*
Practising nurses (in FTE)	Number	*91 766*	*93 077*	*94 987*	*97 104*	*98 568*	*101 227*	**103 503**	**105 926**	**107 515**	*109 479*	*111 681*	*114 227*	*116 607*
	Density (per 1000)	*8.4*	*8.4*	*8.6*	*8.7*	*8.8*	*9.0*	**9.1**	**9.3**	**9.4**	*9.5*	*9.7*	*9.9*	*10.0*

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2023[3] (only values in bold are accurate, other values are based on estimates, see the documentation sheet), PlanCad 2004-2018 for FTE estimates[1]; FPS Public Health annual statistics for 2022 (Licensed practice nurses)[4] because the value in OECD database was provisional; KCE calculation*

Figure 1 – Density of nurses per 1000 population, per nurse category, evolution 2010-2022

*Source: ECD Health Statistics 2023[3] (only values in bold are accurate, other values are based on estimates, see the documentation sheet), PlanCad 2004-2018 for FTE estimates[1];*FPS Public Health annual statistics for 2022 (Licensed practice nurses)[4]; KCE calculation*
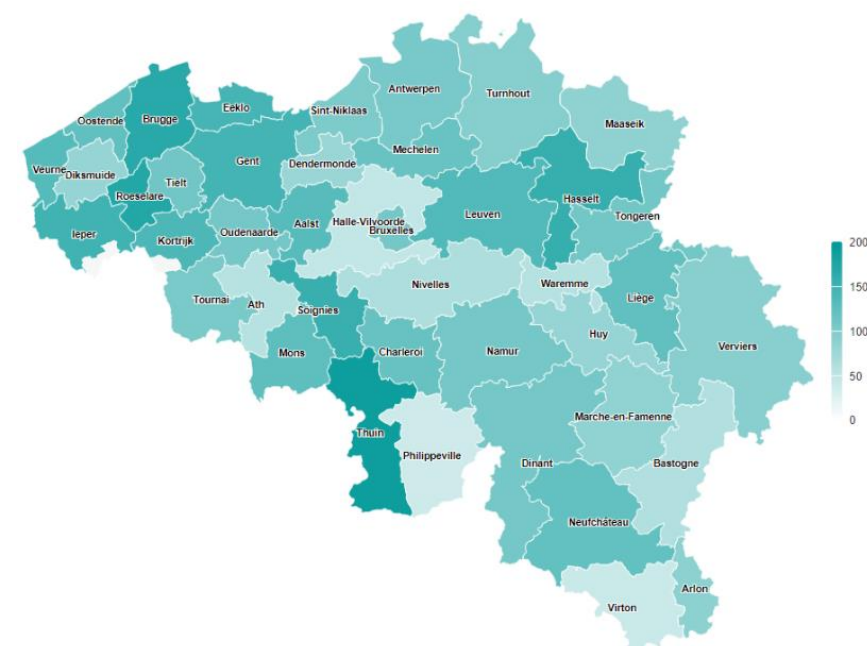
Analysis by activity sector

In 2018, most practising nurses worked as employees in hospitals (62.0% in FTE) followed by home care (17.9% in FTE) and nursing homes (16.8% in FTE) (see Table 4). It should also be noted that while most nurses work in hospitals, the patients to nurse ratio in hospitals is high, 9.4 in 2019, which is above what is internationally considered as a safe patient-to-nurse ratio (i.e. ≤ 8) (see QS-9). A recent KCE exploratory survey performed during the COVID-19 pandemic also showed that the number of FTE registered nurses per 30 residents in nursing homes was below nursing home staffing standards (i.e. 3.8 instead of 5), with a higher number in Flanders (4.1 FTE) compared to Wallonia (3.1 FTE). This study was nevertheless based on a limited sample of nursing homes (n = 56).[8]

Regional comparison

While 60.6% (59.1% in FTE) of practising nurses worked in Flanders in 2018, the density per 1000 population was quite similar between regions (<20% differences, i.e. 11.6 (9.7 in FTE) in Flanders, 10.7 (9.4 in FTE) in Brussels, and 10.1 (8.9 in FTE) in Wallonia) (see Table 3). The density in the German Community seems lower, i.e. 7.0 (5.4 in FTE) but this is an estimation based on the place of residence[b] (no accurate figure available).

The density of practising nurses (number per 10 000 population) is also quite well distributed across districts, with lower density (<50 per 10 000 population) observed around Brussels (Halle-Vilvoorde) or in some districts close to the borders (Virton and Philippeville) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Distribution of practising nurses per 10 000 population, per district, 2018

Source: For a healthy Belgium – Key data in healthcare – Healthcare professionals[9]

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[b] While we can for example easily suppose that an important proportion of nurses working in the hospital of the German Community lives outside the German Community

Table 2 – Nurses (Number and FTE) per demographic characteristics and nurses categories (2018)

		Licensed to practice*	Professionally active		Practising	
		N	N (%)	FTE	N (%)	FTE
Belgium		214 352	148 782	117 382	126 496	107 515
Age	<25	9626 (4.5%)	6773 (4.6%)		6358 (5%)	5894.4 (5.5%)
	25-29	21 838 (10.2%)	17 562 (11.8%)		16 211 (12.8%)	14 918.7 (13.9%)
	30-34	20 178 (9.4%)	16 772 (11.3%)		15 143 (12%)	13 119.5 (12.2%)
	35-39	20 691 (9.7%)	17 935 (12.1%)		15 572 (12.3%)	13 207.3 (12.3%)
	40-44	23 139 (10.8%)	20 231 (13.6%)		16 896 (13.4%)	14 316.4 (13.3%)
	45-49	21 692 (10.1%)	18 774 (12.6%)		15 702 (12.4%)	13 417.1 (12.5%)
	50-54	23 821 (11.1%)	20 258 (13.6%)		16 815 (13.3%)	14 072.1 (13.1%)
	55-59	25 586 (11.9%)	20 329 (13.7%)		16 611 (13.1%)	13 133.6 (12.2%)
	60-64	19 631 (9.2%)	8956 (6%)		6803 (5.4%)	5213.6 (4.8%)
	65+	28 150 (13.1%)	1192 (0.8%)		385 (0.3%)	5894.4 (5.5%)
Community**	French Community	87 436 (40.8%)	57 351 (38.5%)	46 726 (39.8%)	49 769 (39.3%)	43 538 (40.5%)
	Flemish Community	126 916 (59.2%)	91 431 (61.5%)	70 656 (60.2%)	76 727 (60.7%)	63 977 (59.5%)
Gender	Males	29 071 (13.6%)	22 278 (15%)	20 286 (17.3%)	18 798 (14.9%)	18 250 (17%)
	Females	185 281 (86.4%)	126 504 (85%)	97 096 (82.7%)	107 698 (85.1%)	89 265 (83%)
Region of activity**	Flanders	123 474 (57.6%)	90 622 (60.9%)	69 773 (59.4%)	76 613 (60.6%)	63 747 (59.3%)
	Wallonia	57 917 (27%)	42 079 (28.3%)	34 384 (29.3%)	36 832 (29.1%)	32 344 (30.1%)
	Brussels	19 035 (8.9%)	15 933 (10.7%)	13 146 (11.2%)	12 961 (10.2%)	11 346 (10.6%)
	Foreign or unknown	13 926 (6.5%)	148 (0.1%)	79 (0.1%)	90 (0.1%)	79 (0.1%)
Nationality	Belgian		139 804 (94%)	110 202 (93.9%)	118 341 (93.6%)	100 134 (93.1%)
	Non Belgian		8978 (6%)	7180 (6.1%)	8155 (6.4%)	7380 (6.9%)

*Source: PlanCad nurses 2004-2018[1]; *Results differ from **Error! Reference source not found.** because here, people with a midwife diploma registered as nurse are included. ** Based on the language of the diploma and if not available, on the language of the contact; ***Based on the region of activity for salaried workers or workers with a mixed status and based on the home address for fully self-employed nurses or non-active nurses.*

Table 3 – Practising nurses in Belgium (density per 1 000 population), 31/12/2018

		Practising nurses on the health sector			
		N	Density	N (in FTE)	Density (in FTE)
Belgium		126 496	11.1	107 515	9.4
Region	Flanders	76 613	11.6	63 747	9.7
	Wallonia	36 832	10.1	32 344	8.9
	(Including German Community)*	*539*	*7.0*	*419*	*5.4*
	Brussels	12 961	10.7	11 346	9.4
	Foreign or unknown	90	-	79	-

Source: PlanCad nurses 2004-2018.[1], density (own calculation).*Estimation based on the place of residence.

Table 4 – Practising nurses (Number and FTE), per activity sector and per community, 31/12/2018

	Hospital		Nursing homes		Home care		Social welfare and other health sectors		Total	
	N	FTE	N	FTE	N	FTE	N	FTE	N	FTE
Flemish Community	46 862 (61.1%)	38 680 (60.5%)	14 258 (18.6%)	11 175 (17.5%)	14 849 (19.4%)	11 798 (18.4%)	3005 (3.9%)	2277 (3.6%)	76 707 (100%)	63 974 (100%)
French Community	33 237 (66.8%)	27 921 (64.1%)	8286 (16.7%)	6883 (15.8%)	9845 (19.8%)	7465 (17.1%)	1799 (3.6%)	1361 (3.1%)	49 739 (100%)	43 531 (100%)
Belgium	80 099 (63.3%)	66 601 (62.0%)	22 544 (17.8%)	18 058 (16.8%)	24 694 (19.5%)	19 263 (17.9%)	4804 (3.8%)	3638 (3.4%)	126 446 (100%)	107 505 (100%)

Source: Projection 2043[10-14]; Some nurses worked in multiple sectors meaning that the total does not equal to the sum of the sectors

International comparison

Based on OECD Health Statistics, the increase in the density of practising nurses between 2010 and 2018 was more important in Belgium than for the EU-14 and EU-27 averages (+15.4% versus +4.5% and +6.2% respectively) (see Table 5 and Figure 3). In 2018, Belgium had 11.1 nurses per 1 000 per population, which is three nurses more than the EU-27 average and 1.5 nurses more than the EU-14 average. International comparisons on practising nurses must nevertheless be used with caution as definitions differ between countries. Moreover, numbers expressed in FTE would give a better picture of the real situation.

Table 5 – Density of practising nurses (number per 1000 population), in Belgium and EU averages (2010-2018)
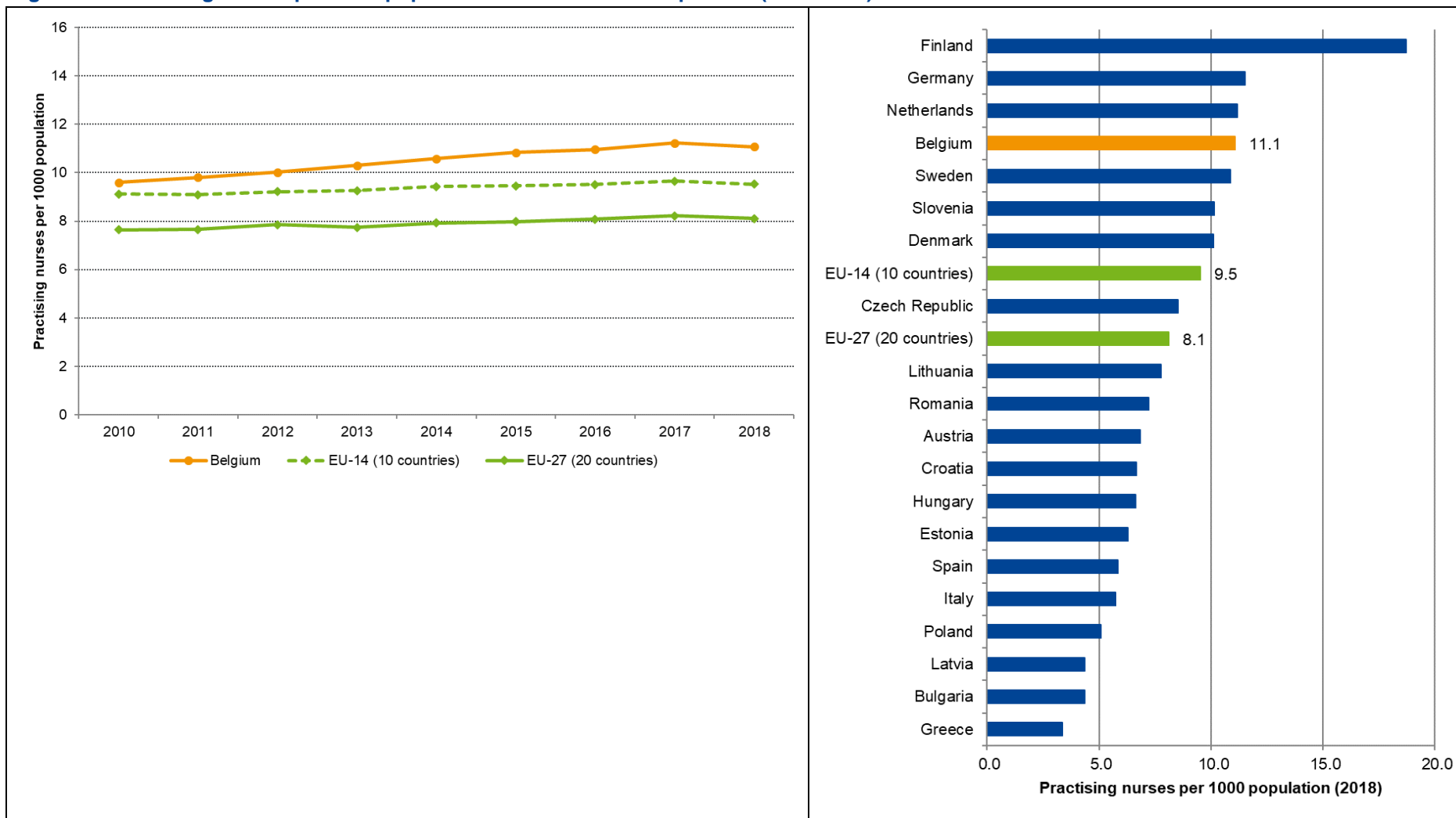
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Belgium	9.6	9.8	10.0	10.3	10.6	10.8	11.0	11.2	11.1
EU-14 (10 countries)	9.1	9.1	9.2	9.3	9.4	9.5	9.5	9.7	9.5
EU-27 (20 countries)	7.6	7.6	7.8	7.7	7.9	8.0	8.1	8.2	8.1

Source: OECD 2021 Health Statistics (see also the documentation sheet for details on the data sources)

Figure 3 – Practising nurses per 1000 population: international comparison (2010-2018)

Source: OECD 2021 Health statistics (see also the documentation sheet for details on the data sources)

Key points

- **The PlanCad project[1], resulting of a linkage of several administrative databases, allows precise estimation of the number of nurses working in the Belgian labour market (professionally active nurses) and active in the health sector (practising nurses). The latest available PlanCad project for nurses is based on 2018.**

- **In 2018, there were 210 507 nurses licensed to practise, 148 782 nurses professionally active on the labour market, and 126 496 nurses practising in the healthcare sector (107 515 in FTE). Based on estimates, there were about 161 364 nurses professionally active on the labour market and 137 193 practising nurses (116 607 in FTE) in 2022 (KCE calculation).**

- **The density of practising nurses in Belgium in 2018 was 11.1 per 1000 population (9.4 in FTE) and was quite well distributed between regions, with 11.6 (9.7 in FTE), 10.1 (8.9 in FTE), and 10.7 (9.4 in FTE) practising nurses per 1000 population in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels respectively. It was also quite well distributed between districts, except in some districts around Brussels (Halle-Vilvoorde) or close to the boarder (Virton and Philippeville), with a density below 5 per 1000 population. The density of practising nurses in the German Community seemed also lower, i.e. 7.0 (5.4 in FTE) practsing nurses per 1000 population but this is an estimate based on the place of residence.**

- **Most of practising nurses worked as employees in hospitals (62% in FTE) followed by home care (17.9% in FTE) and nursing homes (16.8% in FTE). Nevertheless, according to recent KCE surveys, the number of patients / residents per nurse in nursing homes and hospitals remain too high compared to standards / international quality norms.**

- **The number of practising nurses per 1 000 population in Belgium increased from 9.6 in 2010 to 11.1 in 2018. This increasing trend was also observed in other European countries but was higher in Belgium than the EU-27 and EU-14 averages (+15.4% vs +4.5% and 6.2% respectively). The number of practising nurses per 1 000**

- **population in Belgium was above the EU-27 (+3 nurses in 2018) and EU-14 (+1.5 nurses in 2018) averages. International comparisons on practising nurses must nevertheless be used with caution as definitions differ between countries. Moreover, numbers expressed in FTE would give a better picture of the real situation.**

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